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ABSTRACT

This paper compares the selection process for a high school principal in a medium-sized school district in the western United States with the principal selection process in the school system of New South Wales, Australia. The author first briefly describes the two school systems on which the study is based and then examines in considerable detail the process of principal selection in each system. Following these essentially descriptive sections, the author discusses the differences between the two principal selection processes and presents his assessment of the major weaknesses of each process. (JG)

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OSSC BULLETIN

SELECTING A HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL IN THE U.S. AND AUSTRALIA: A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY

by
Fenton Sharpe

Oregon School Study Council
Vol. 19, No. 9
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FOREWORD

How are high school principals selected in New South Wales, Australia? How does that process compare with the way a U. S. school district selects its high school principals?

As Inspector of Schools, New South Wales, Australia, Fenton Sharpe has been directly involved in principal selection. He has been in the U. S. for two years completing his doctorate in educational administration at the University of Oregon, where he has been a graduate research assistant in the Field Training and Service Bureau. In this Bulletin, he compares the selection processes in his home state with the process used by a U. S. district, pointing out strengths and weaknesses of each and suggesting some ways for overcoming those weaknesses.

Of particular interest is Sharpe's description of the New South Wales selection process--a very different approach from the typically American one.

Gail Fullington
Assistant Executive Secretary
Oregon School Study Council

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A. INTRODUCTION

While a vast literature has been accumulated around the role of the school principal, little has been written about how the system goes about the task of selecting the appropriate person to fill that role. And yet "the selection of capable individuals who will be effective administrators for the schools presents a problem as great and probably more crucial than that of training them." (McVey, p. 1)

"As the principal, so the school" remains a commonplace belief among upper-level district administrators, teachers, community members, and educational theorists and researchers as well. The following statement is typical--"What a principal does or fails to do is felt in homes as well as in classrooms and corridors of a school. He influences the quality of instruction, relationships between people, acceptance of or resistance to change, morale, and efficiency of general operations . . . a principal can make a difference where it counts, for he practices his art at an important focal point, namely, the school building." (A.A.S.A., p. 9)

It follows, then, that the decision to select a particular principal for a particular school must rate as one of the most crucial of all decisions taken by a school district. This is especially true of those decisions relating to high school principals, as they are normally more visible to the public in their roles than are their elementary counterparts. At the same time the institutions they lead are ordinarily more

complex and the problems presented by their clients (teenagers) appear to be more pronounced in the public mind.

It is no surprise then that one administrator interviewed in this study regards the selection of a new high school principal as "the next most important personnel decision to the selection of a new superintendent," and that at the time in which it is made "it supersedes in importance all other school district decisions including those relating to budget, curriculum, and facilities."

This paper is concerned with a comparative study of the selection process for a high school principal in a medium-sized school district in a western U. S. state and the parallel process in New South Wales, Australia.

B. METHODOLOGY

Data for the New South Wales system were gathered:

1. From letters describing and commenting on the selection processes from the deputy-director of secondary education, the staff inspector in charge of inspections, and an area director.
2. From critical articles on the inspection system, written by observers from within the system and without.
3. From personal recall of the writer's own experiences, first as a teacher undergoing inspection, then as an inspector intimately involved in the promotion process.

Data for the U. S. system were gathered:

1. From interviews with senior district personnel officers and

the principal whose process of selection was under scrutiny, with one of the university professors intimately associated with state certification requirements for principals, and with a principal of another high school in the same state who had previously been an applicant for various principalships.

2. From the meager supply of writings on the topic.

C. TWO SCHOOL SYSTEMS--A BRIEF DESCRIPTION

1. The U. S. school district lies on the outskirts of a medium-sized city. The district is about 60 square miles in area, and has a total population in the vicinity of 100,000. Total student enrollment is approximately 22,000, and they are served by about 1,250 teachers and administrators. There are three high schools in the district.

2. Public education in Australia is administered by state-wide departments of education. The New South Wales system encompasses about 800,000 square miles and serves a total population of over 3,000,000 people. In these terms it is one of the largest educational units in the western world. Total student enrollment is approximately 900,000, and they are served by about 42,000 teachers and administrators. There are over 400 high schools in the system and an average of six new high schools are opened every year. A large number of principals' appointments must be made annually.

D. SELECTING A HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL IN THE U. S. SCHOOL DISTRICT

1. Vacancy. The vacancy under scrutiny was created when the

previous principal was appointed to a central office position in the same district.

2. Job Description. A job description for the vacant position was written by senior personnel officers with input from the director of secondary education. The description was based on an informal analysis of the particular needs of the school and an agreement as to the general functions of a high school principal.

3. Advertising Vacancy. A notice was directed to the placement centers in all major western universities. It included statements of the vacant position, timing, salary range, and what was required and preferred in relation to experience, training and credentials. Job descriptions were forwarded to all inquirers.

Several key university professors were called to assist in the dissemination of information about the vacancy to potential candidates both on campus and within school districts.

In the case under review the selected principal became aware of the vacancy through a university job listing service. Others heard of it from their district personnel offices and via the "educational grapevine."

4. The Screening Committee.

a. Personnel--In this case a screening committee was appointed by the assistant-superintendent for personnel, consisting of himself as chairman, the director of secondary education, the director of personnel, and a principal of one of the other high schools in the district. These four administrators then appointed to the committee one member of staff from the high school as a "teachers' representative." Different

perceptions of this role were evident, as a senior personnel officer referred to him as "truly representative of staff involvement" but the newly appointed principal saw him as "a token staff member who had no grasp of the interview process." Despite his earlier assertion on "staff involvement," the personnel officer did indicate that because of "major staff problems" in the school "it would not have been wise to include a teacher member elected by the staff." An analysis of committee personnel reveals that:

(i) There is no community representation. The opinion was expressed that "the superintendent feels he has the administrative responsibility to hire personnel" . . . "he views the board as the citizens' input" . . . "there is no need for grassroots input." This is in keeping with the A.A.S.A. point of view--"it is declared unequivocally that responsibility for selection and assignment of principals rests in the superintendency." (A.A.S.A., p. 10)

(ii) There is no student representation.

(iii) The superintendent was not actively involved at this stage. (In smaller districts the superintendent is himself likely to chair the screening committee, or he may well make the appointment by himself purely on his own judgment.)

At this point it is interesting to note a change in hiring policy in the district which will affect the make-up and functions of future principal selection committees. Two separate and completely independent committees will be employed. The first, a criteria committee, will contain community, student and staff representation, and will be

charged with the responsibility for analyzing the needs of the situation and establishing selection criteria to meet those needs. A completely separate committee composed entirely of administrators will perform the screening function. In that way, information will be obtained from all involved groups but the decision-making power will remain firmly in the hands of the administrators.

b. Task and Process--In this case the screening committee was charged with the task of narrowing down the field to one, two, or three finalists for the superintendent's approval. This would be achieved by (i) an informal analysis of the vacant situation leading to establishment of criteria based on state requirements, the situation and the job description already disseminated, (ii) analysis of the files, (iii) personal contacts with references, and (iv) choice of and interviews with finalists.

These will be dealt with in turn.

(i) Criteria--It was agreed that this particular school presented a large number of problems and that the new principal would need above all else to be a change agent. In light of Carlson's studies on executive succession, it is little wonder then that the final choice was made from outside of the district. (Carlson, pp. 4-17) In fact this appointee was the only principal in the history of the district appointed as an outsider. The words of three of the direct participants are informative:

Senior personnel officer: "We were looking for a fit with the present administration, and a fit with the particular school at that particular time."

Another senior personnel officer: "We talked about the type

of person and philosophy that could pull that thing off."

New principal: "It seemed most important to get a match between the school and the person."

This approach is in keeping with current thinking on the selection process. Erickson noted in 1963 that "in the light of mounting evidence of the multi-dimensionality of administrative behavior and of marked differences in school situations . . . there should be more emphasis . . . on matching administrators with situations." (Erickson, p. 1) A similar approach is taken by McClelland, et al. in relation to the identification of talent in general. "One's general strategy must shift from identifying 'talented persons' to matching persons with certain characteristics to situations in which those characteristics will be most adaptive." (McClelland, et al., p. 236)

The title of the 1967 A.A.S.A. booklet on the selection of principals, "The Right Principal for the Right School," (A.A.S.A., p. 1) leaves no doubt as to where that body stands on the issue.

The job description which was made available to all applicants and which served as a basis for initial screening and interviewing was written in general terms only. In it, only the emphasis on the principal's role as a "change catalyst" offers any clues as to the specific needs of the particular school.

In a discussion of criteria, a few words should be expended on the question of administrative certification, as the regulations relating to it serve as a criteria baseline in the selection of all school principals in the particular state. It is at this point, too, that the selection process is influenced by organizations and people outside of

the school district: the universities, and other professional educators as they are represented on a state committee on educational standards. Two major assumptions seem to be embodied in the certification requirements: that one can be a successful school principal without having been a teacher; and that one is not likely to be a successful principal without having completed a large number of hours in academic study at a university, with an emphasis at the graduate level upon courses related to educational administration.

At this stage no principals have been appointed in the state without some experience as a teacher. No useful comment can therefore be made on the former of these requirements. As to the latter requirement, Bridges and Baehr published a review of the literature in 1971 which demonstrated that "most studies show no relationship between the amount of educational training and subsequent success as judged by superiors and subordinates." (Bridges and Baehr, p. 2) In fact, research by Gross and Herriott (supported by studies of Lipham, and Schutz) demonstrates a negative relationship between the total number of courses in educational administration and professional leadership in practice. (Bridges and Baehr, p. 3) Erickson, et al., found less flexibility in schools led by more highly trained principals. (Bridges and Baehr, p. 4) With this kind of evidence, it may be time to heed those who advocate "a general downgrading of the importance of education as the major credential . . . experience and performance should gain greater importance . . . individuals should be judged on what they can do rather than where and how long they have been in school." (Miller, p. 73)

(ii) Analysis of the files--The members of the screening

committee next sifted through the files, individually recording comments on a sheet of questions based directly on the job description. The committee then met as a group, and by a process and consensus, narrowed down the field to six prospective finalists.

To this stage the elimination process was based entirely upon the written file records. Each file contains an outline of university qualifications and experience together with letters of recommendation, usually from the candidate's immediate supervisors in previous school districts and from university professors with whom they have been associated. It is generally considered "that written credentials or letters of recommendation have some value in identifying the least likely candidates but do little to aid discrimination among the good, better and best." (A.A.S.A., p. 36) It was for the former purpose that they were initially employed by this screening committee.

Greatest weight is given to recommendations from recent school district supervisors. This raises two questions. How informed is the judgment of such references? And, how completely frank and honest are their written statements?

In very few U. S. school districts is there a regularized process of administrative evaluation based on direct in-school observation by trained evaluators. In the absence of such processes, recommendations may be based at worst on the number of complaints about the principal received by the superintendent from the community, teachers, and the board, on his promptness or tardiness in completing reports, or on whether he "rocks the boat" or not. At best it is likely to be based on a "general, distant kind of informal evaluation, drawn from

observations of his work in district committees, etc." In these conditions reputation can often be confused with reality. The A.A.S.A. booklet puts it this way--"The latest horoscope for the candidate might be as valid and as reliable as letters of recommendation or credentials." (A.A.S.A., p. 37) All participants in this study agreed that recent "open file legislation" has had a significant impact on the value that can be placed upon the recommendations contained in candidates' files. In an open file, references would appear to pitch their comments at a more general level and avoid all negative or noncommital references. As a result, many selection committees are turning to personal contact with references to obtain the "complete and honest information" they require.

(iii) Personal contacts with references--When the field had been narrowed to about six names, each member of the screening committee was commissioned to make "personal contact" with the "major references" of each of the finalists. The purpose was to "verify and clarify" statements in the file and to seek "subjective feelings, doubts, etc." which may be more easily expressed orally then in a written, open file system. This was regarded as "the most important step in the whole process."

One wonders what the impact of the emerging system will be. As with many reforms mandated with excellent intentions "from above" it is not inconceivable that the results will be the exact reverse of the "open process" being strived for. As the written documentation becomes more suspect, so a reliance may be placed on oral opinion, feelings, innuendos, and perhaps even gossip, hearsay and tale-telling, all

completely out of reach of the candidate concerned. With certain individuals sitting in positions of great power in this regard, the temptation to act as "kingmaker" or to "play God" may not always be easy to resist. Thus the system can be increasingly subject to "political" pressures and the dubious advantages of personal sponsorship. One wonders also whether candidates can ever live down even one single past error (actual or presumed) which may be raised as a doubt during these personal contacts now so vital to the selection process.

(iv) Interviews--Five candidates were finally selected for interview. Each finalist was interviewed separately by each member of the screening committee. Interviews were informal, extended for about one hour, and took place in various locations. Each interviewer was seeking to assess the candidate "as a whole person in relation to the school situation and job description." The candidates were ranked by each interviewer separately, before the group came together again.

In this way the personnel staff feel that they obtain a many-faceted view of each candidate which may be more accurate than that provided by the same people acting in committee. The successful candidate concurred, stating that at the end of the process "they had enough information to make a true assessment of me as a candidate."

Mayfield's review of the literature on personnel interviews suggests that this approach is a relatively sound one. Mayfield notes that there is "a general lack of evidence concerning the interviews' reliability and validity," that "the attitudes of interviewers do impinge upon their interpretation of what the interviewer says," that "interviewers tend to make their decisions early in the interview--and

that their decisions are more likely to be based on manner, facial expression, and personal appearance than on information obtained during the interview," but that "when positive results are found for interviews--it turns out that a team approach has been used--interviewing and rating separately . . . and then reaching a final group decision." This, he writes, is "a more promising interview method." (Mayfield, pp. 85-94)

(v) Final screening process--Following individual interviews and rankings, the screening committee met, and by consensus, narrowed the field down to only one candidate, who was recommended to the superintendent. As this recommendation was ultimately accepted by the superintendent and the board without dissent, it appears that in this case at least, the effective power of decision-making did reside in the screening committee.

From our knowledge of authority and its relationship to organizational hierarchy (Blau and Scott, p. 139), it is reasonable to suppose that the assistant-superintendent of personnel played a very powerful role in contrast to that of say the teacher "representative" who, in addition to being a subordinate with only two years professional experience, was participating in his first screening committee and had been dependent upon the other committee members for his appointment to the committee. Besides this, all of the other committee members owed their present positions in the system, at least in part, to the assistant-superintendent for personnel. What their individual strengths were in the informal power structure of the committee, it was impossible to discover for the purposes of this study. It would appear, however,

that to all intents and purposes, the decision was taken without any real effective input from the community, the teachers or the students, four out of the five remaining committee members being district administrators, superordinate to the newly selected principal. Peer input was limited to the one high school principal on the committee.

5. The Superintendent's Role. As indicated, the superintendent accepted the single recommendation presented to him from the committee by the assistant-superintendent for personnel. This acceptance followed his perusal of a resume on the candidate prepared by the personnel office, and discussion with the assistant superintendent.

By contrast, under the system now operating, three names would be carried (with resumes) to the superintendent. He would then consult with his senior personnel officer and the director of secondary education, and together they would screen out two candidates and send one on to the board. This process is thought to "give the superintendent more flexibility," allowing him "to take political considerations into account," and in particular it enables "affirmative action to flow into the process." Thus, what seemed to be a studied effort to depoliticize the system, and to delegate the authority for making important personnel decisions to subordinates, seems to have been thwarted by the intrusion of legal requirements relating to affirmative action.

This district has taken affirmative action seriously indeed. A director has been appointed primarily to oversee affirmative action. The board has adopted policies which include the setting of specific employment goals to overcome present perceived inequities within five years. These policies set out specific percentage goals for minorities,

women, and men in every district unit and level of operation, and states that recruitment will be carried out on the basis of minimum qualifications for the specific job in question without regard to age, national origin, race, color, religion, sex, or the presence of any sensory, mental or physical handicap.

The influence of the policy is felt at two main points in the selection process. At the screening committee stage an attempt is made to review the papers in a general atmosphere implicitly in keeping with the policy. At the later stage, when the superintendent and his two senior officers make a final choice of one candidate from three, the influence is an explicit and decisive one. It is felt that the final decision is now not always for the best qualified person but for someone who is at least minimally qualified and who contributes to the achivement of the district's affirmative action goals.

Thus, it appears that in the two major areas where legislation impinges on the process (open files and affirmative action) the influence has potentially been towards a more "political" system.

6. The Role of the School Board. Only the board has the legal authority to hire a school principal. In this district, the board has invariably accepted the recommendation of the superintendent in all instances relating to the appointment of new personnel.

In this particular case the superintendent carried the single recommendation with resume to the board in closed executive session. Explanations were given and questions answered (about this candidate or other unsuccessful ones). A unanimous vote of acceptance followed and the appointment was formalized in the subsequent open board meeting.

At no stage were any board members actively involved in the selection process, nor did any of them meet the principal until some considerable time after his appointment.

7. Informing the Candidates. The successful candidate was so informed by telephone immediately after the board meeting, the unsuccessful finalists in writing the following day. No reasons were offered to any of the candidates for their success or failure. Note that, presumably as a legal cover, recent affirmative action policies require documentation of the reasons for the selection of the person to whom the position is offered. It is not mandatory, however, that these reasons be disclosed to the candidate himself.

Under this kind of system, with its general lack of feedback, it is difficult to see how unsuccessful candidates can use the process in aiding them to overcome weaknesses and further develop their areas of personal strength. One can imagine the frustration associated with repeated failure to obtain positions for which one felt qualified.

E. SELECTING A HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL IN NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA

In 1854 a commission was established to investigate and report on conditions in schools throughout N. S. W. The report was highly critical. Teachers were reported as being "poverty-stricken" and as having become members of a "despised profession." (Barcan, p. 94) Out of this report emerged the Inspection System, whose task was to provide a centralized control over teaching methods, and to provide the basis for equality of educational provisions by reporting regularly on school

sites, buildings, equipment, pupil discipline, school tone, teaching methods and pupil standards. There can be no question whatever that the inspection system succeeded in many of its basic aims--to provide substantial equality in education for all elementary school pupils, to create efficiency in a system which covered a vast geographical area and to improve general standards of teaching and pupil achievement in basic areas of knowledge.

More than a century has passed since the establishment of the inspectorate, and vast changes have occurred in the social structure of the State and in its educational system.

Yet it has been the observation of many critical observers of the N. S. W. Inspection System that it has failed to keep pace with the pressure for change. Educational observers from other countries have contributed significantly to the general climate of criticism. Butts, in 1961, wrote that the inspection system was preoccupied with "maintaining a smoothly running craft on an even keel" (Butts, p. 64) and Kandel perceived that promotion depended "on the faithful performance of routine duties in a service which does not place a premium on initiative." (Kandel, p. 59)

Nor has there been any dearth of criticism among educationists within Australia. G. R. Eastwood declared in 1964 that the inspection system was based on "rigid principles of conformity, the prevalence of which cannot be justified in a democratic state" and that it "precludes the growth of truly professional teachers." (Eastwood, pp. 71-78) Many, like A. G. Maclaine, have pointed to the tendency for the system to tempt "teachers to window-dress their work, pander to the fads the

inspector was supposed to have, and to cover up their weaknesses." (Maclaine, p. 23)

Despite all of these criticisms and despite the veritable revolution in our social and educational structures since 1854, "it is but very recently that the inspection of teachers, as it has developed from the days of William Wilkins has been brought under close scrutiny." (Buggie, p. 6)

This "scrutiny" consisted of an examination of the system by a committee, appointed by the director-general in 1970, which invited input from various interested bodies.

The report, as finally adopted, was based on submissions from interested parties and there was no empirical research to collect "hard data" on the effects of the system. In fact, after more than 100 years of its operation, no attempt has been made to evaluate the inspection system in any more than an anecdotal manner. Perhaps as a result, no substantial changes were made in the processes by which a teacher progresses through the ranks to the position of school principal--the final stages of which process are set out below.

1. Eligibility. Eligibility for the position of high school principal is based on certain minimum qualifications:

   a. A bachelor's degree or its equivalent

   b. A teacher's certificate (awarded normally after four years of training and one successful year of teaching)

There are no requirements relating to graduate study nor to any compulsory hours in educational administration. In fact, a large majority of high school principals in the state have no university

qualifications beyond the bachelor's degree and have had no exposure to the theory of administration. Implicit to the system is a skepticism about the practical value of university training in administration and an immense trust in on-the-job experience and in-service training to develop administrative skills.

With these basic qualifications, a high school teacher can move upwards through the system by negotiating the following prescribed steps:

a. Completion of at least five years of teaching;

b. Successful inspection for placement on Promotions List II;

c. Appointment by seniority on the list to the position of department head;

d. Completion of at least four years in that position;

e. Successful inspection for placement on Promotions List III;

f. Appointment by seniority on the list to the position of deputy-principal;

g. Completion of more than one full year in that position.

In his second year in the position, the deputy-principal may apply for an inspection with a view to placement on Promotions List IV, from which all principals' appointments are made.

This progression, with its emphasis on regulations, basic minimum qualifications, time spent in various positions, merit, and seniority, displays many of the hallmarks commonly associated with succession in a bureaucracy. Weber's seminal statement on bureaucracy emphasized "continuous organization of official functions bound by rules . . . the principle of hierarchy . . . selection on technical qualifications . . . discipline and control." He stated further that being a bureaucratic

official "constitutes a career . . . there is a system of promotions according to seniority or to achievement, or both." (Weber, pp. 330-334)

An important and wholly untested assumption of the system is that success as a principal depends on having shown competency at each level in the system. An incompetent or mediocre teacher can never obtain List II, no matter how excellent in matters of administration. Nor can a deputy principal who is not at home with certain elements of school organization hope to attain the principalship even though those specific skills may not be vital to that new role. Thus each step is thought to offer indispensable experience for the next, and no provision is made for by-passing any rungs on the ladder.

2. Personnel of List IV Inspection Team. The List IV inspection panel consists of four inspectors, including the local district inspector (whose main responsibility is in elementary schools, but who also serves as a continuing administrative link between the department and the secondary schools in his district), the supervising secondary inspector (responsible for general oversight of that school and several others), and two other secondary inspectors, one of whom serves as panel chairman. Each of the inspectors has been appointed by the director-general from the ranks of subject-masters/mistresses, deputy-principals, and principals because of "his superior skills" in teaching and administration and because of his "judgment, his human qualities, his objectivity." (Jones, p. 36) In other words, they have been judged to be highly successful within the system by others who were themselves previously so judged.

Note that there is absolutely no input from the community, the

universities, any of the deputy-principals' peers or subordinates, or the students, into the inspection process. The principal of the school plays a vital advisory role but is in no sense legally responsible for the decision made.

So the promotion of teachers lies totally in the hands of senior professional officers within the system, themselves appointed by other more senior officers within the same system. No outsiders normally enter the system at any level in the hierarchy other than that of teacher.

Despite its large size and complexity, it is essentially a closed system. It is doubtful if such an organization can escape that chronic sickness described by so many sensitive observers of large bureaucracies, namely the perpetuation and promotion of the "organization man"--people who have been "unfitted by being fit in an unfit fitness." (Merton, p. 196) Merton describes the syndrome in the following manner: "Adherence to the rules, originally conceived as a means, becomes transformed into an end-in-itself; there occurs the familiar process of displacement of goals whereby an instrumental value becomes a terminal value." This can lead to rigidities and an inability to adjust readily, formalism, and ritualism, "stereotyped behavior, not adapted to the exigencies of individual problems," (Merton, pp. 200-206) It is distinctly possible (though not intended) that members of the inspectorate have been selected because of their devotion to organizational means rather than ends, and that through the system of promotion by inspection they are perpetuating their own image throughout the various levels of the organization.

The insights of Presthus on this phenomenon are interesting. Because bureaucracies are highly structured social fields with "stimuli that are patent, stable and compelling," they provide cues to behavior that have potent effects in molding personality types. Those who react positively to bureaucratic structure and succeed in it, he terms upward mobiles. They have high job satisfaction, close identification with the ideals of the organization, accepting its legitimacy, rationality and values, and accommodating by emphasis on efficiency, self-control, and dominance. They over-simply and idealize, and therefore act with little conflict. They show deference for those above them hierarchically and expect deference from those below. They feel at home using hierarchially patterned communication processes and show an intense interest in the procedural aspects of organizational life. (Presthus, pp. 135-203)

Is this the kind of person who becomes an inspector? If so, is this the image of the man or woman he promotes to the principal's chair?

A more typical criticism from teachers within the system is that promotion goes to the "window-dressers" whose characteristics match those of Marvick's "Hybrids." They are "politicized" individuals concerned with "influence, advancement and salary--fair weather friends--superficial and showy performers--no exacting concern with performance standards--they initiate change to better themselves personally--they are operators who treat most job conditions egotistically, dispassionately assessing them as a means of furthering career ambitions in calculable ways." (Marvick, pp. 144-147)

As an insider, the writer does not feel justified in making

judgments as to the success or failure of the organization in avoiding these excesses and dysfunctions. He is, however, conscious of the great value that could be obtained if the system were opened more fully to influences from outside.

3. Criteria. The only explicit clue available to teachers on inspection criteria is contained in the official Manual of Advice on Inspections: "Where a teacher in a promotion position is being assessed, the panel will form a judgment concerning his/her professional skill, managerial ability, the effectiveness of his/her supervision and leadership, and the utilization of physical and human resources within his/her area of responsibility." (Department of Education, N. S. W., p. 15)

The inspectors themselves, however, work from a much more detailed and confidential list of suggested criteria developed by a committee of inspectors. These include general organization (timetable, curriculum, routines, etc.), school management (pupils, staff, premises, etc.), community relationships, service background, professional qualities (philosophy, reading, knowledge of educational trends, attitudes to change, etc.), and personal qualities (leadership, humanity, public image, initiative, etc.).

Because of the nature of the system, the emphasis is on general characteristics associated with likely success as a principal. It is totally impossible to match the qualities of a particular person to the needs of a particular school situation.

Why is the criteria document kept confidential to the inspectorate? Is there a fear of "window-dressing" to satisfy the criteria rather than a genuine effort to do a conscientious job? Does it

represent an attempt by the inspectorate to maintain power over the teachers by being able to pull a "surprise card from the deck"? Is there a concern that a "check-list" approach will lead to legalism and leave less room for informed and honest professional judgment? Whatever the answers to these questions, there can be no doubt that the system as a whole would benefit from an open discussion of inspection criteria, including all interested parties, in particular the teachers themselves. In this way, goals might be mutually agreed upon, and the positive influences of self-evaluation fed into the inspection process.

4. Inspection Procedures.

a. Preparation--When a panel is appointed for a particular inspection, the chairman visits the school to acquaint the deputy-principal with procedures. There is normally no discussion about criteria.

b. The Inspection Itself--The inspection is carried out over a four-day period. The panel first agrees to a differentiation of duties (e.g., one inspector may concentrate on the deputy's role in general school organization, another his philosophy and personal qualities, etc.). Information is gathered by direct observation of the deputy in his various roles (e.g., leading a school assembly, conducting a staff meeting, interacting with individual staff members and pupils, in a community meeting, etc.), by examination of written records, by discussion with the principal, and by the interview process. It is not considered ethical to seek the views of subordinates, students, or members of the community. The panel does not come armed with information on the candidate's service in other schools. Every possible attempt is

made to ignore the past and assess the work of the candidate in this school over this particular period of time.

The principal may elect to provide the panel with a written report on the candidate (a copy of which must also be supplied to the deputy). In any case there is invariably a lengthy interview with the principal in which he is given the opportunity to discuss the merits and possible weaknesses of his deputy in a detailed manner and to make a recommendation. The principal's opinion is never treated lightly and it is a relatively rare occurrence for the panel and the principal to radically differ in their assessments. In such a case the inspectors would feel obliged to spend a great deal of time with the principal in an attempt to gain consensus with him.

The deputy undergoes a separate interview with each of the panel inspectors in turn. In these interviews they explore all of the issues in the criteria document already mentioned.

Throughout the inspection week, the panel members meet regularly for a discussion of their observations and a resultant re-ordering of their priorities.

At the end of the fourth day the panel meets to reach a decision. Each inspector first reports on his area of responsibility and gives a general assessment as to the readiness of the candidate for principalship. After general discussion, a rating on a scale of A-E is made privately by each inspector based on all of the information they now have. Candidates with three C's and one D or better have negotiated the inspection successfully.

The inspection organizer now:

(1) Informs the area director of the decision;

(2) Informs the principal and offers reasons for the panel's decision;

(3) Informs the candidate himself, discussing in detail his strengths and weaknesses as perceived by the panel, and giving explicit reasons for any negative decision. The candidate is free to ask any questions and to discuss any issues raised. (This is sometimes a most traumatic experience and is resented by some candidates. Others regard it as a valuable learning experience and seem to grow because of it.)

(4) Writes a brief report on the candidate, recommending him (or not) "for further consideration." This report is signed by the inspectors and forwarded to the candidate with copies being retained by the administration.

A whole treatise could be written around the procedure described above. Some have criticized the artificiality of a situation in which outside observers "live in" the school for such a period. Some are unhappy with the relative unimportance of the principal's role, others concerned about the strength of his possible influence. Some feel that the deputy's future is too much dependent on the circumstances peculiar to a specific point in time as opposed to the long-term value of his work. Some consider that too much emphasis is placed on his present role and insufficient on an assessment of his potential in a new and different role. No one questions the rigor of the evaluation experience, however, there rarely being any doubt that the decision is based on close, detailed knowledge of the candidate's work in his present position.

5. Interview at Area Level. All candidates within an area who are successful at inspection are interviewed by a panel consisting of the local area director and a director from another area. The final determination regarding promotion is made by the local area director.

Only two documents are held by the interviewers prior to and during the interview--a bare statement of the candidate's service record and his recent inspection report.

The interview is not highly structured, the objective being to establish a situation in which the candidate is given "ample opportunity to reveal his potential as an educational leader in the higher position to which he aspires. It is considered unnecessary to retrace matters already assessed by the panel of inspectors."

Since the interview system was established, 35% of all candidates have been screened out during inspection and 5% more during interview, leaving a total success rate of 60%.

It seems clear that the decision-making for future principals is fairly firmly in the hands of the inspectorate, with the final power remaining in the hands of the area director.

6. Reporting Following Interview. Candidates are informed in writing almost immediately of their success or failure and the area director calls at the school of the unsuccessful candidate to explain to him personally the reasons for his failure. A written report is submitted to the director of secondary education on all unsuccessful candidates in case of appeal.

7. Appeals. Let us assume that a hypothetical deputy-principal has been unsuccessful at the inspection stage. He has the following avenues of appeal:

a. Request to the area director for a review of the proposed determination. The area director may, on evidence presented, alter the inspectors' recommendation and grant an interview, call for a re-inspection, or reject the appeal. The request is most commonly rejected but occasionally a re-inspection is ordered.

b. Assuming the candidate's request to the area director is rejected, he may now appeal to the director-general. The appeal must be made on the substance of the inspectors' written report.

This appeal is heard by a promotions lists committee consisting of a nominee of the director-general (chairman), a nominee of the N. S. W. teachers' federation, and a third member appointed by the other two--usually a principal of a teachers' college. Committee decisions are taken by simple majority vote. Its recommendations are forwarded to the director-general for his final determination. Custom is that he always abides by the committee's recommendations.

This committee may also exercise the three alternatives described earlier.

c. Let us further assume that our candidate's appeal has been upheld by the promotions committee and that at the interview he is once again unsuccessful. He may now appeal once again to the director-general and his case be heard by the same committee. This appeal might be upheld, another interview called for, or rejected. If he is again unsuccessful at a second interview he has no further right of appeal.

No figures are available on the total success rate for appeals. The writer's guess is that about one in three appeals is upheld by the promotions committee, at least to the extent of re-ordering a second

inspection. To this date there have been no successful appeals against decisions taken at the interview stage. The power held by the teachers' college principal on the promotions committee is considerable as the representatives of the department and the teachers' federation almost always negate each other's votes.

The tremendous protection given to the teacher in the system should by now be obvious. The following are some examples:

(1) The candidate must personally receive all written reports relating to his record. (Open reporting is axiomatic to the system as a whole--it is regarded highly by the inspectorate as a major ethical principle.)

(2) At each new inspection the candidate starts "with a clean sheet" as far as this is possible. Many present principals have lived down earlier major problems because of the deliberately "short memory" of the inspectorate.

(3) The reasons for all decisions are mandatorily conveyed to the candidate both orally and in writing.

(4) There is a multi-level appeal system which has tended in recent years to rule increasingly in the teacher's favor.

8. Promotion to a Principalship. If successful at interview, the candidate's name is placed on the Fourth Promotions List as from the first day of the next biennium according to strict rules of seniority.

In mid-year a list of all principalships falling vacant in the coming year is distributed to all persons on the Fourth List. They apply in priority order for all acceptable schools. Applicants are matched to positions by seniority, with transferring principals always

holding seniority over those seeking their first appointment. These allocations are subject to appeal, but only on the ground that principles of seniority have not been upheld.

Thus, no attempt is made to match "the right principal to the right school."

It is interesting that in a promotion system so clearly based on the identification of merit, the final resort is to the age-old bureaucratic process of seniority. (Crozier, pp. 70-72) The reason is probably to be found in the essentially centralized nature of the system. If principals were to be matched to particular schools, the decision would almost inevitably require the establishment of local school or district selection committees with considerable powers. When such a proposition was hinted at in a white paper from the director-general's office recently, the opposition, especially from the teachers' federation, was so strong that the proposal has been shelved, at least for the time being.

F. DISCUSSION

We have just described the processes by which, in two western, English-speaking, democratic societies, two systems with essentially similar purposes and similar clientele set out to achieve exactly the same end--the selection of a high school principal.

An overwhelming impression remains of great differences and only minor similarities between the processes so described.

Some observed <u>similarities</u> are as follows:

1. Both systems rely on locally traditional selection processes. Neither system has conducted rigorous research into the validity of its particular technique. The result is that minor changes only have been effected in the processes over a long period of time.
2. Following from #1 above, neither system is using contemporary testing devices for the isolation of executive talent, nor have they considered seriously the "special assessment center" approach as used with great success by some large corporations. (Wikstrom, pp. 110-117)
3. Reliance continues to be placed in both systems upon the selection interview as a final screening device (despite serious questions as to its validity).
4. Decision-making at this level remains in both systems rather firmly in the hands of professionals.
5. In both systems the decision is made essentially by officers parallel to or above the principal in the organizational hierarchy.
6. In neither system are the complete selection criteria made explicit to the prospective principal.

Some observed <u>differences</u> are as follows:

1. In N. S. W. there is an established, experienced group of full-time evaluators (the inspectors) who carry out the major part of the selection process. There is no counterpart in the U. S. system.
2. In N. S. W. there is a clear association between an on-going

personnel evaluation process and selection for promotion. In the U. S. system there is no such association; in fact, there is little formalized administrative evaluation.

3. In N. S. W. the selection decision is taken about four to five levels down into the hierarchy of the organization, in the U. S. system only about one to two levels down.
4. In N. S. W. there is no community input whatsoever. In the U. S., the community as represented by the board holds final legal power to hire (and future community input into selection criteria is seriously contemplated).
5. In N. S. W. the universities have no input whatsoever. In the U. S. they control the vital credentialing requirements, administer the placement centers, and contain key people who are personally influential in the selection process.
6. In many ways the N. S. W. system is less subject to "political" influence than its counterpart in the U. S. (An excellent example is the impact of affirmative action.)
7. In the U. S. system there is greater provision for input by subordinates and peers than in N. S. W. (This sometimes includes students, although this is not the practice in the district under review.)
8. The N. S. W. selection system is regularized by a host of rules and regulations relating to experience and progression. The U. S. system has no formally regularized process of selection.
9. The information on which promotions are made is gathered by in-school inspection in the N. S. W. system, but from written

and oral recommendations often based on more distant evaluation in the U. S. system.

10. In N. S. W., there is a compulsory open reporting to the candidate of the reasons for the decision taken. This is not so in the U. S. system.
11. In N. S. W., employee protection seems to be given at least as much weight as selection of the suitable candidate. In the U. S., the emphasis is on choosing the best (with seemingly little regard for the others).
12. In N. S. W., all promotions to principal are from within the system. In the U. S. they may come from inside or outside of the system.
13. A corollary is that in N. S. W. teachers look forward to continuous career advancement within the one system. This is not a typical U. S. teacher expectation.
14. The seniority concept plays an explicit part in the N. S. W. system. This is not so in the U. S.
15. In N. S. W. there is a multi-tiered appeals system against unjust promotion decisions. U. S. teachers also have legal recourse against discriminatory selection practices but the process is not as clearly institutionalized or regularized as in N. S. W.
16. In N. S. W. there is no attempt to fit a particular person to a particular position. In the U. S. system this is the crux of the whole selection process.

The evidence that emerges points to a N. S. W. system which is highly

complex in terms of both hierarchical and horizontal role differentiation as well as spatial distribution, is fairly highly formalized in terms of social control, offers typically bureaucratic career patterns to its employees, and displays many of the attributes of a closed social system.

The U. S. system has fewer vertical layers and less horizontal specialization. It is a geographically compact system (albeit also a subsystem of a wider state "system" of public education). The selection process is not so regularized and the system rarely offers within itself a lifetime career pattern for an ambitious and capable young employee. As a more open system, it interacts more directly with its environment than does the N. S. W. system.

In the writer's opinion, the major weaknesses in the U. S. processes are as follows:

a. The selection process is unrelated to systematic personnel evaluation and development.

b. It is open to personal and "political" influences.

c. There is little opportunity for candidates to live down a past error or soiled reputation (warranted or not).

d. Selection can be based on information of dubious value.

e. The university credentialing system is of doubtful validity.

In partial solution of these problems it may not be beyond the resources of the state department (perhaps in association with the universities) to set up a special division skilled in teacher and administrator evaluation to serve the needs of the school districts. People interested in promotion to administrative positions could call for a

personal evaluation of their work in the school system by the officers of this "independent" evaluation agency. Along with in-school observation, the prospective administrator could voluntarily attend a special assessment center as used by the Bell System and described by Wikstrom. (Wikstrom, pp. 110-116) Such a center has been used with great success by the N. S. W. Public Service for some years. The evidence is that this kind of assessment center is "able to make remarkably accurate judgments of potential for advancement." (Wikstrom, p. 117) Reports from these evaluative processes would be confidential to the candidate to assist in his or her personal development and could be used by him or her alongside of the typical recommendations now used in application for a specific position. It might be assumed that persons who elected not to undertake this kind of evaluation would be at a disadvantage against those who offered this type of additional evidence. The innovation could be associated with a relaxation of some of the academic credentialing requirements.

The major weaknesses in the N. S. W. system as I see them are as follows:

a. The danger of perpetuating the "organization man."

b. Selection criteria are largely unknown by the candidate.

c. There is no attempt to match the person with a particular position.

d. The length of the promotion ladder can frustrate ambition.

e. The system is not open to the recruitment of outsiders.

There is no single easy solution to these problems, especially in an organization which tends to resist change. Steps taken would need,

then, to be incremental, and associated with a well planned and executed educative process.

In regard to criteria, there is no reason why a committee consisting of present principals, deputy-principals and inspectors, and even students, teachers, and community members, could not be constituted to develop inspection criteria based on perceptions of the principal's role in modern Australian society. The criteria so developed would be disseminated widely, and could be the subject of discussion between the inspectors and the teacher some considerable time before the inspection.

To encourage innovative ideas and practices, teachers, principals and inspectors should be enabled and encouraged to visit educational systems in other states and countries, and to further their university studies.

The panel for deputy-principal's inspection should be made up of two inspectors, the principal of the school, and an outside member, for example, a university professor, drawn from a list agreed to by the federation and the department.

Vacancies should not be closed to outsiders. All positions should be openly advertised and the seniority system for appointment from List IV abandoned. A local selection committee consisting of the area director, district inspector, supervising secondary inspector, a teacher and perhaps a representative of the parents' and citizens' association, would make the selection from the Fourth List or from qualified outsiders, to match the person and the position.

Candidates could make use of the Public Service Board's already established assessment center to assist in personal development and

provide further evidence of readiness for promotion.

More flexible regulations allowing for the more rapid advancement of excellent candidates could be devised.

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